

Executive summary

Believing in local action

Successful partnership working between
the faith sector and local infrastructure organisations

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The purpose of the study

This study aims to identify the benefits of successful partnership working between third sector local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) and local faith communities. It also offers some good practice points, which can be considered and adapted in the light of local circumstances. It provides material which will be of particular use to local infrastructure organisations, as well as faith organisations and networks.



Background, policy, research

Government policies and programmes have placed increasing importance on the role of the third sector and on partnership working at local level in order to secure better outcomes for local communities. Partnerships support better delivery not only in the specific area of local and neighbourhood services, but also in securing broader strategic aims such as sustainability and cohesion. Substantial government programmes implemented through the Community Development Foundation, ChangeUp, and now Capacitybuilders and Futurebuilders provide a policy context to this study and have resulted in major programmes for third sector capacity building.

At the same time there has been a recognition of the importance of faith based social action, and there has also been a concern to understand how to develop support for the third sector as a whole through local infrastructure organisations.

The “Strong and Prosperous Communities” white paper (CLG, 2006) has encouraged third sector organisations to consider how they organise themselves to improve representation in public life. “Principles of Representation” (CLG and NAVCA, 2007) stems directly from the white paper, providing a framework for the third sector to consider how to achieve a collective voice and some of the ways in which the principles identified (accountability, equality, leadership, openness, purpose, sustainability, values) might work in practice. Communities and Local Government have been working with NAVCA and the Church Urban Fund to produce this publication of case studies and good practice guidance for partnership working between local infrastructure organisations and local faith communities. Although it has wider application, it is particularly relevant to the development of a national inter faith strategy which began with the publication by CLG of “Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society” (CLG, 2007).

This study has therefore been developed as a resource linked to this framework for inter faith dialogue and social action. It is designed to support the local implementation of this strategy. In particular it focuses on beneficial outcomes for local communities.

Focus of the study

The question of how faith organisations could work in partnership with local infrastructure organisations is addressed in two main contexts:

- How they can build their strengths and capacity for social action.
- How they can influence partners and in doing so release the full potential of their resources for wider public benefit.

The study identifies three main areas of activity which are necessary to promote partnership working between faith organisations and local infrastructure bodies:

- Activities which build social capital and in particular bridging capital create ways in which faith organisations at grass roots level can be supported to develop their social action programmes in order to bring individuals, groups and communities together.
- Building practical networks and relationships which support those activities and create a cooperative environment of mutual support.
- Supporting and sustaining an infrastructure which enables voluntary, community and faith organisations to work together to shape and influence partnerships with others, and results in beneficial outcomes for communities and neighbourhoods.

About the study

“Believing in Local Action” starts by drawing on the national policy context and recent experience. The researcher then carried out case interviews and a focus group meeting conducted with people in a range of roles within faith organisations and local infrastructure organisations. The report provides and analyses seven case studies from locations across England. Each location provides a particular focus.

- **Birmingham** Creating an infrastructure by working to shared objectives
- **Burnley** Funding, shared resources and creating common space
- **Devon** Faith representatives in the third sector promoting joint social action
- **Hull** Breaking down barriers through training and networking
- **London Borough of Newham** The role of faith workers in developing social action and networks
- **Stoke on Trent** Making faith groups visible with faith audits and coordinating partnerships
- **Warrington** Working together to make the best use of scarce resources

Recommendations – seven actions

“Believing in Local Action” recommends seven actions for faith organisations and LIOs to explore further, drawing on the experience from the case study areas and other examples of good practice. These actions are designed to be followed flexibly to suit local needs.

- Use of mapping and faith audits (Stoke, Newham)
- Finding opportunities for contact and exchanges (Burnley, Warrington)
- Development of partnerships based on common objectives and activities (Birmingham, Burnley)
- Reciprocal sharing of resources (Devon, Hull, Warrington)
- Training and learning events including “faith awareness” (Hull, Newham)
- Development of networks and infrastructure organisations (Birmingham, Stoke)
- Multi faceted feedback and communications systems (Stoke, Hull)

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